



## After the first multidisciplinary evaluation

Your child's first multidisciplinary evaluation decides eligibility. It also helps with your first Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP).

There may be other times when your child will need evaluation services. If you and your Early Intervention Official agree, other evaluation services can be provided:

- If there is a change in your child's development that suggests different services are needed.
- When you, your service coordinator, or service provider feel more information is needed to review or evaluate your current IFSP.

Once evaluation services are agreed upon, your service coordinator is responsible for making sure changes are made to your IFSP.

## Requirements for a fair (unbiased) evaluation

The Early Intervention Program has rules to make sure your child's evaluation is fair. These are:

- Your child's evaluation team must use materials and activities that are sensitive to your family's language. The evaluation must be completed in the "dominant" language of your family. "Dominant" language means the language you most often use when speaking to your child.
- The cultural background and traditions of your family must be considered in your child's evaluation. Families raise children using their own cultures and ideals. Your child's evaluation team must take this into account in deciding what materials to use and describing your child's responses to the evaluation.
- Your child's eligibility cannot be based on only one test or procedure. This means that more than one source of information must be used to decide whether your child is eligible.

## The family assessment

Every family is different. You know your family best—and what it can do to help your baby's or toddler's development. You know what is most important to you, your child, and family—and what concerns you most.

As a parent, you bring your resources, priorities, and concerns to the early intervention process. *Family resources* are all the strengths, abilities, and formal and informal supports that families can use to help their child. *Family priorities* are the outcomes you want most from early intervention services.

## Early Intervention and your child's "medical home"

**E**very child needs a *medical home*. A *medical home* is the doctor—or doctors—who take care of your child's health. A "medical home" is the place you *always* bring your child when she or he needs a checkup or is sick.

Your doctor can give you support and advice about the Early Intervention Program. To help your doctor stay involved:

- Ask your service coordinator to send your child's evaluation report and summary to your doctor.
- Talk with your doctor about your child's evaluation and what services might help your child.
- Invite your doctor to your IFSP meeting.
- Give your doctor a copy of your IFSP. Or ask your service coordinator to send one.
- Talk with your doctor about how early intervention services are working for you and your child.



*Family concerns* are the problems or needs you want to work on with your child and family.

This information can be helpful in designing the IFSP for you and your child. If you wish, you can participate in a *family assessment*—an assessment of the family's resources, priorities, and concerns.

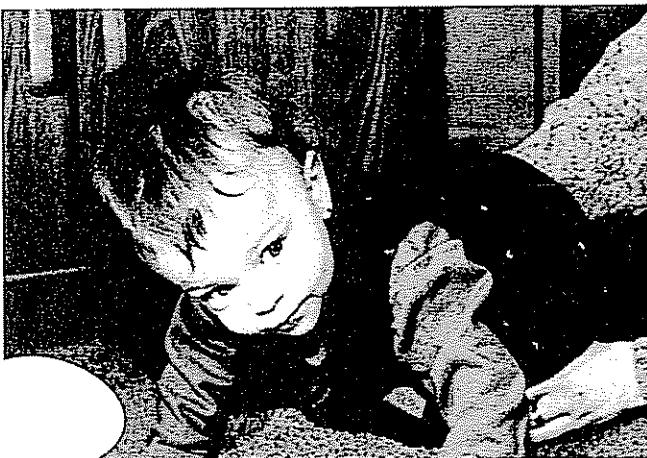
Family assessment is a *voluntary* process. You do not have to take part in one! All information shared is kept private and you decide what goes into your IFSP.

If you decide to participate in a family assessment, it can help you:

- Think about what you need most from early intervention services.
- Think about other services and supports you might need (like another parent to talk to or respite services).
- Prepare for your IFSP meeting.

Your family assessment will be:

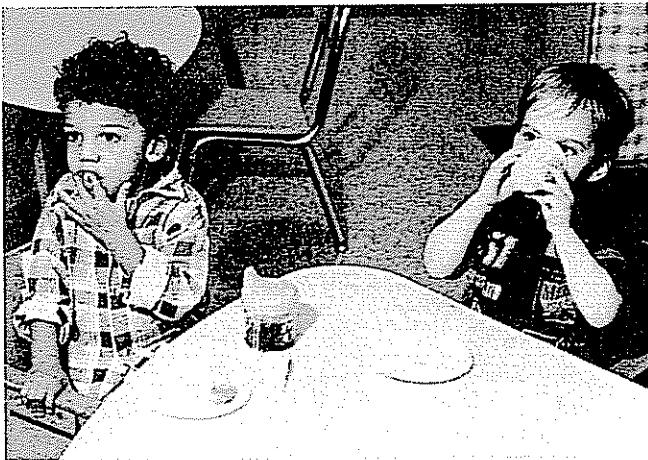
- Completed with you by trained professionals, at times and places good for you.
- Based on information provided by you and your family in a personal interview.
- Your description of your family's resources, concerns, and priorities.



## When an evaluation finds that a child is not eligible

If your child's evaluation shows that your child is not eligible for services, you have the right to disagree with the results. You can request a *mediation* or an *impartial hearing* to challenge this decision (see page 26, "Your Rights as a Parent in the Early Intervention Program"). You can take these actions only when your child's evaluation has been completed.

If you agree your child is not eligible—and still feel you need help—ask your service coordinator for information about other supports and services in your community. Your service coordinator can help you make connections with other services.



## Tips on being an effective parent advocate

- Remember you are an equal member of the team.
- Know your family's rights and responsibilities.
- Stand up for what you think about your child and family's strengths (what you do best) and needs (what you need help with).
- Take part in every step of early intervention services.
- Ask questions!
- Ask professionals why they think you and your child need certain services and how they will help.
- Keep copies of letters you write and notes from talks you have with your service coordinator and service providers.
- Work out problems early. If you cannot solve a problem, use the rights you have under the Early Intervention Program (see page 26).
- Ask about parent support and advocacy groups in your neighborhood, town, or city. Call them for advice, support, or help.

# Step 4: Making a Plan for Services—Your IFSP

## I-F-S-P means...

**Individualized**...the plan will be specially designed for you, your child, and your family.

**Family**...the plan will focus on your family and the outcomes you hope to reach for your baby or toddler and your family through early intervention.

**Service**...the plan will include all the details about the early intervention services your child and family will participate in – including when, where, and how often services will be delivered. Your IFSP can also include other services that your child and family needs that will not be paid for by the Early Intervention Program.

**Plan**...the plan is a written plan for early intervention services.

...family-centered!

If your child is eligible for the Early Intervention Program, the next step is to develop an *Individualized Family Service Plan* (IFSP). Your IFSP must be completed within 45 days after your child's referral to the Early Intervention Official, unless YOU "stop the clock" (for example, if your child is sick and the evaluation must be delayed). The IFSP is the written plan for the early intervention services your child and family will receive. You will work on this plan at an *IFSP meeting*.

Your initial service coordinator will set up the meeting to work on your IFSP. Your initial service



coordinator will tell you what happens at the IFSP meeting and help you prepare. Some facts you need to know are:

- The IFSP meeting must be held at a time and place that is good for you and your family.
- You, your initial service coordinator, your Early Intervention Official, and evaluation team – or selected member of the team – *must* take part in the meeting. Your Early Intervention Official may send someone else to represent him or her (an Early Intervention Official "designee"). The Early Intervention Official may also ask your service coordinator to act as "designee."
- You can invite others to be at the IFSP meeting – family, friends, your babysitter, or child care provider.
- Your service coordinator can invite others to take part in the meeting, with your permission.
- You can ask an advocate to take part in the meeting.
- You need to give permission to use any information from your family assessment, if you had one.



- You will be asked to select an *ongoing service coordinator* at the meeting.
- The meeting will be held in the language you speak, unless it is clearly impossible to do so.

Before the meeting, your initial service coordinator will make sure you understand your child's evaluation. She or he will also talk with you about the possibilities for early intervention services.

Here are some suggestions for what to think about when planning for your IFSP meeting, and things you may want to talk about with your initial service coordinator:

- How would you describe your child to others?
- What is working well for you at home?
- What do you need help with?
- What help do you want for your child?
- What do you need more information about?
- What places or activities in your community could early intervention help your child take part in?

## Strategies for a successful IFSP meeting

Some families have said the IFSP is hard work! It is very important for you to take an active part in the meeting. This is the *BEST* way to the *BEST* plan for you and your family.

- Think about – and make plans for – someone to help you if your baby or toddler and/or other children will be at the meeting. Even if your meeting is at home, children can be distracting!
- Plan to start on time.
- Be prepared. Make a list of questions or matters you want to discuss. Have paper and a pen or pencil ready to take notes.
- Listen to what other team members have to say.
- Be clear about what you want.
- Ask questions when you don't understand something.
- Don't be afraid to ask for help!

## At the IFSP meeting

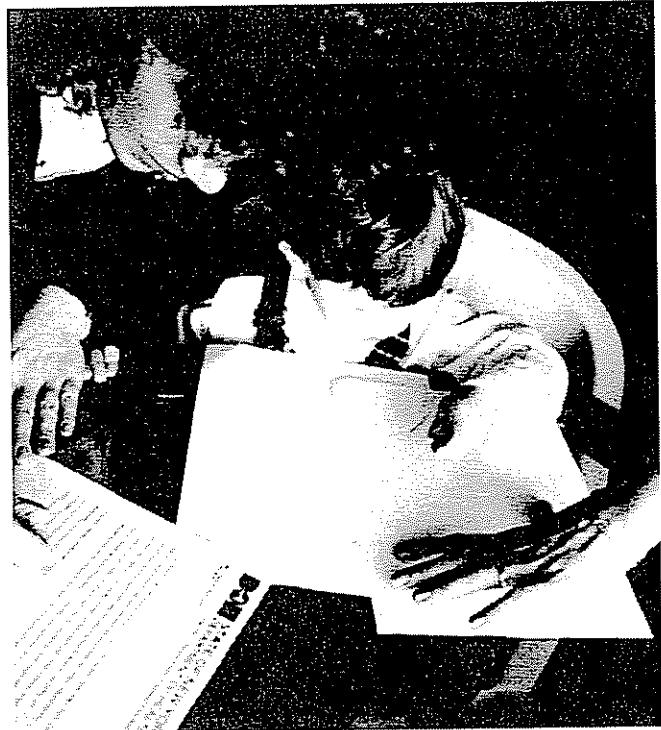
Working on the IFSP is a team effort! You, your service coordinator, your child's evaluators, your Early Intervention Official, and others who take part will:

- Review all the information that has been gathered about your child.
- Talk about your family's resources, priorities, and concerns.

## What's in an IFSP?

Your family's IFSP will include the following information:

- A statement of your child's present level of functioning
- With your permission, a statement of your family's resources, priorities, and concerns related to your child's development
- A statement of the major outcomes expected from early intervention services.
- A statement of the early intervention services, including transportation, needed to meet your child's and family's needs.
- A statement of the natural environments where early intervention services will be provided. "Natural environments" means settings where infants and toddlers are typically found in the community.
- A plan for when your child is in day care, and when needed, for early intervention service providers to train the day care staff to meet the needs of your child.
- A physician's or nurse practitioner's order for early intervention services that require an order from specific medical professionals.
- A statement about other services, including medical services, that are needed by your child and family that are not provided by the Early Intervention Program.
- The projected dates that services will begin, as soon as possible after the IFSP meeting, and the period of time during which the services will be delivered.
- The name of the ongoing service coordinator.
- If your child is turning three, the steps to help your child and family change to other services, including preschool special education services.



- Develop the outcomes—or goals—expected for your child and family from early intervention services.
- Work on strategies, activities, and services that will lead to the outcomes you hope to reach.
- Agree to the measures and timelines that will be used to look at the progress your child and family are making.

You have the right to say yes or no to any of the services talked about at your IFSP meeting. To include a service in your IFSP, you and your Early Intervention Official (or Early Intervention Official designee) must agree to the service. Others can give their opinion—but you and the Early Intervention Official have the final decision.



If you and the Early Intervention Official disagree about an early intervention service you think your child needs, you can ask for a *mediation* and/or *impartial hearing* to settle your differences. In the meantime, the early intervention services you and your Early Intervention Official do agree on will be provided.

You will be asked to sign your IFSP when the plan is finished. Participating in the Early Intervention Program is voluntary. When you sign the IFSP, you show that you were at the IFSP meeting and that you agree to the services in the plan. You are also giving your permission to start early intervention services.

The IFSP is an important document! If you need extra time to think about the plan, ask for it. You may want to discuss the plan with other family members or review it to make sure it meets the needs of your child and family.

## Selecting your ongoing service coordinator

You will be asked to choose an *ongoing service coordinator* at your first IFSP meeting. You can choose your initial service coordinator or you can choose someone else who is qualified to be a service coordinator.

Choosing your ongoing service coordinator is an important decision. This service coordinator will be responsible for putting your IFSP into action. Your ongoing service coordinator will also be responsible for:

- Helping you obtain the services and help you need.
- Coordinating early intervention services with other services your family is getting.
- Making sure your child and family get all the services in your IFSP.
- Making sure services are delivered on time.
- Helping you find service providers.
- Informing you about advocacy services.
- Making sure *six-month reviews* and *annual evaluations* of your IFSP are completed.
- Helping you make any changes to your IFSP that may be needed between six-month reviews and annual evaluations.

# Step 5: Putting Your IFSP Into Action

An important goal of the Early Intervention Program is to make sure infants and toddlers get early intervention services as quickly as possible. The sooner, the better!

Your family's IFSP will include the dates, as soon as possible after the IFSP meeting, when early intervention services will begin. Your ongoing service coordinator is responsible for making sure the early intervention services in your IFSP are delivered and helping out with any problems.

Putting your IFSP into action, though, is a team effort! You and your family are important members of the team. Be a part of your child's services. You can do this by:

- Being with your child when she or he is getting early intervention services. Arrange for services at times good for you, when you can pay full attention to what's happening.
- Asking the professionals working with your child to teach you the skills you need to help your child make progress.
- Keeping notes, a diary, or a journal about how well services are working and how well your child is doing. Think about what is and what isn't working. Ask for a change in services if you think a change is needed.

## Reviewing, evaluating, and changing the IFSP

As your child grows and changes, so will the early intervention needs of your family. To be sure your IFSP keeps pace with your family and stays useful, the Early Intervention Program requires:

- Six-month reviews of the IFSP. The review may—or may not—include a meeting. If everyone



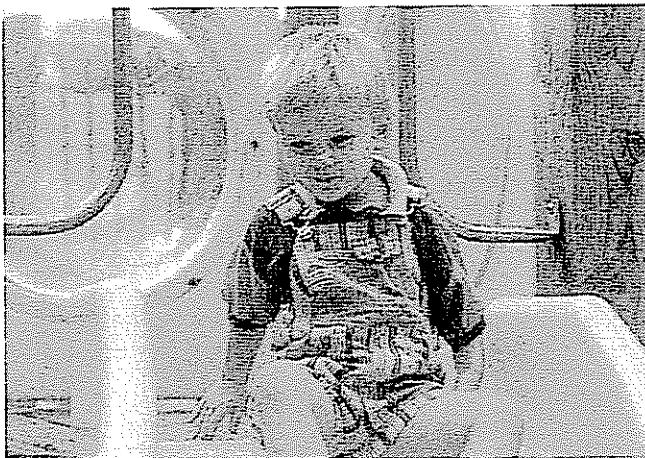
agrees, the six-month review can be completed over the phone or by mail, or other ways that don't involve a meeting.

- Annual meetings to evaluate the IFSP.
- A process for changing the IFSP between the six-month reviews and annual meetings.

Your ongoing service coordinator is responsible for making sure the IFSP is reviewed and evaluated on time. The following persons take part in the six-month reviews and annual meetings to evaluate the IFSP:

- You and anyone you ask to participate.
- Your ongoing service coordinator.
- Your Early Intervention Official or designee.
- The professionals who are providing services to your child and family, if it makes sense to include them.
- Other persons invited by your service coordinator, with your permission.
- An advocate, if you invite one.

The six-month reviews and annual meetings to evaluate the IFSP are designed to make sure that the



IFSP still makes sense for your child and family. You and the other participants will look at how well early intervention services have helped your child and family meet the outcomes in your IFSP. You will also talk about what should be changed in the IFSP. This may include:

- Adding new outcomes and dropping old ones that have been reached – or that are no longer important or useful.
- Changing strategies and activities to help meet new outcomes or outcomes that have not been reached yet.
- Changing the services needed by your child and family.

Just like your initial IFSP, you and your Early Intervention Official must agree on IFSPs that come out of six-month reviews and annual IFSP meetings. You will be asked to sign the IFSP, to show you agree and give your permission to provide services. And just like your initial IFSP, you can ask for a mediation or impartial hearing if you disagree with your Early Intervention Official about certain services – while getting the services you do agree on.

You can request a review of your IFSP at any time. Your ongoing service coordinator can set up an IFSP review whenever one is needed.

# Step 6: Transition

tran·si·tion . . .

*means passage from one form, state, style, or place to another.*

All too soon, your child will be turning three years old! As your child changes from a "toddler" to a "preschooler," he or she will also be "transitioning" from the Early Intervention Program to other services. Children can stay in the Early Intervention Program for a short time after they turn three.

- If your child's third birthday is between January 1st and August 31st, your child can stay in the Early Intervention Program until August 31st of *that calendar year.*\*
- If your child turns three between September 1st and December 31st, your child can stay in the Early Intervention Program until December 31st of *that calendar year.*\*

Your ongoing service coordinator will help you plan for other services when your child leaves the Early Intervention Program. Some children will no longer need any services. Other children and families may go on to early childhood programs or to other appropriate services in the community. Many children in the Early Intervention Program will be eligible for *preschool special education services* from their school districts and counties.

## The steps to transition

A transition plan must be developed for every child leaving the Early Intervention Program and going into other services.

Usually, the transition plan is developed at your last IFSP meeting before your child transitions. Your child's transition plan will include:

- The steps needed to help your child get used to and get along in a new setting.
- The steps needed to prepare service providers who will help your child transition to a new setting and/or services.
- The individuals responsible for taking the steps needed to help your child make the transition.

With your permission, your service coordinator will incorporate the transition plan into your IFSP.

If you or someone else thinks your child may be eligible for preschool special education services, your Early Intervention Official will notify the Committee on Preschool Education (CPSE) in your school district. Your Early Intervention Official can notify the CPSE only with your permission. If you give your permission:

- Your Early Intervention Official must notify the CPSE at least 120 days before your child can start preschool special education services.
- Your service coordinator will review transition steps with you.
- Your service coordinator will send evaluations, IFSPs, and other records to the CPSE—with your permission. If your child is referred in writing to CPSE, you have the right to select an evaluator approved by the State Education Department from a list provided by the Board of Education. The CPSE, with the approved

---

\*These dates apply only to children who are eligible for CPSE services. Otherwise, a child's eligibility for EI services ends at the child's 3rd birthday. (An amendment to Public Health Law Sections 2541 and 2548 on age-eligibility for EI services was passed as part of the 2003-2004 NYS budget.)

## Preparing for transition

Here are some tips for preparing your child and family for the transition from the Early Intervention Program to preschool special education services:

- Learn what transition is and why it is important for your child and family.
- Learn what is the same and what is different between early intervention and preschool.
- Make sure your last IFSP includes all the necessary steps to help your child make a good transition to preschool special education services or other early childhood services.
- Find out what you need to know and what skills you need to develop to make sure you get the most out of preschool special education services.
- Get a copy of *A Parent's Guide to Special Education* – published by the State Department of Education. Ask your school district for your free copy.
- Call your local Early Childhood Direction Center (ECDC – see page 2). The ECDCs are funded by the State Department of Education to help parents and children get preschool special education services.

Some questions for parents to think about in making the transition are:

- What new information is needed about your child?
- What skills will your child need to get along in a new setting?
- Are there adaptive equipment needs, or modifications needed where your child will be getting preschool special education services?



evaluator, may review the existing evaluations and records sent by your service coordinator to determine if there is a need for additional evaluations before you and the CPSE can decide if your child will be eligible for preschool special education services.

If you agree, your Early Intervention Official will convene a conference with you, your service coordinator, and the chair of the CPSE in your school district to discuss your child's transition. This conference must happen at least 90 days before your child's third birthday.

A transition conference can happen in many ways. For example, it can be a telephone conference call, or it can be combined with the first meeting of the CPSE. The transition conference must be at a time and place good for you and the other participants.

For more information about preschool special education services, contact the Preschool Special Education Unit at the State Department of Education at (518) 473-6108.

# Your Rights as a Parent in the Early Intervention Program

Parents have rights under the Early Intervention Program that you should know. Your Early Intervention Official is responsible for making sure you know about your rights. These rights include:

- The right to say yes or no to having your child evaluated or screened and taking part in a family assessment.
- The right to say yes or no to participating in the Early Intervention Program, without risking the right to take part in the future.
- The right to say yes or no to any certain type of early intervention service without risking your right to other types of early intervention services.
- The right to keep information about your family private.
- The right to look at and change your child's written record under the Early Intervention Program.
- The right to be told by your Early Intervention Official about any possible changes in your child's evaluation or other early intervention services before any changes are made.
- The right to take part – and ask others to take part – in all meetings where decisions will be made about changes in your child's evaluation or services.
- The right to use due process procedures to settle complaints.
- The right to an explanation of how your insurance may be used to pay for early intervention services.

Part of your service coordinator's job is to explain these rights to you and make sure you understand them and help you carry them out.

## Your child's records

Your child's record includes all written materials developed or used for the Early Intervention Program. Your child's record may include:

- Information gathered as part of your child's referral to the Early Intervention Official.
- Screening and evaluation reports and summaries.
- Your family assessment (if you took part in one).
- Your Individualized Family Service Plan and all documents related to the plan.
- Progress notes and other information about your child's and family's services prepared by early intervention service providers (including your service coordinator).
- Any records about complaints you may have filed.
- All other records involving your child and family.

All information in your child's record must be kept confidential by the Early Intervention Official and early intervention evaluators, service providers, and service coordinators. You must give your written permission to allow information in your child's record to be released. There are two types of "releases" that you can sign:

- A *selective release* – this type of release requires you to identify the persons who can access the information in your child's record and from whom they can get the information.
- A *general release* – this type of release will allow information to be shared with individuals and agencies that will be providing services to your child and family.

No matter what type of release you sign, you can change your decision about who can access your child's record at any time.

## As a parent, you have the right to...

- Ask what materials are being collected and kept in your child's record by your Early Intervention Official and service providers.
- Ask who has access to your child's record and who has seen or has copies of the record.
- Review—in person or through a representative—your child's record at any time. Your service coordinator can help you arrange to see your child's record. A sample letter of request is on page 36.
- Ask for copies of any of the materials in your child's record. You may be charged a small fee for copying.
- Request that changes be made to your child's record. If you feel that any information in your child's record is wrong, misleading, or violates your child's and family's privacy and rights, you may ask your Early Intervention Official, service coordinator, evaluator, or service provider to correct or change the information. Once you ask for a change, the person you asked must tell you in 10 days whether:
  - the change has been made as you requested; or
  - your child's record has not been changed.

If your Early Intervention Official, service coordinator, evaluator, or service provider disagrees and will not make the change you asked for, you may have a statement placed in your child's record about your concerns.

You can also appeal the decision and ask your Early Intervention Official for an administrative hearing. The hearing will be conducted by a local official who has no direct interest in the hearing results. This hearing must be held within 30 days and conducted in accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).



## If you and your Early Intervention Official disagree

Sometimes, parents and Early Intervention Officials do not agree on what early intervention services should be in the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP). For example, you may not agree with your Early Intervention Official about:

- The kinds of services your child and family should have.
- How often services should be provided.
- How long services should be provided.
- What service model is best.
- Where services should be provided.

Parents have the right to use either *mediation*, an *impartial hearing*, or both to resolve disagreements with their Early Intervention Official about early intervention services. There is no cost to you for either a mediation or an impartial hearing.

Any early intervention service in the IFSP that you and your Early Intervention Official agree on can be provided while you take part in either mediation or an impartial hearing.



## What is mediation?

Mediation helps parents and Early Intervention Officials agree to early intervention services in the IFSP. Mediation brings parents and Early Intervention Officials together to talk about their concerns. Mediation is *confidential*—what you talk about with your Early Intervention Official will be kept private.

## What can mediation do?

The main reason for mediation is to help you and your Early Intervention Official reach agreement as easily and quickly as possible. Mediation can:

- Clear up a misunderstanding or the cause of a problem.
- Let you and your Early Intervention Official speak your minds with a neutral person listening.
- Help you and your Early Intervention Official work together to better solve a problem.

## You can ask for mediation . . .

The first step is to send a letter to your Early Intervention Official to ask for mediation (see the sample letter on page 37). Your service coordinator can help you with this.

Your Early Intervention Official can also ask you to take part in mediation. Mediation is a *shared decision*. You and your Early Intervention Official must *both* agree to take part in mediation. If you *both* agree, your Early Intervention Official will tell the *Community Dispute Resolution Center* in your county about your request.

The *Community Dispute Resolution Center* will assign a mediator to work with you and your Early Intervention Official. The mediator may ask you and your Early Intervention Official for more facts before getting started.

A mediator will set up a *mediation meeting* for you and your Early Intervention Official within two weeks of being contacted by your Early Intervention Official—unless you ask for more time.

## Who attends the mediation meeting?

You and your Early Intervention Official (or EIO designee) must both attend the mediation. You may invite others to come with you to the meeting—a family member, friend, or advocate.

You may bring a lawyer if you let your Early Intervention Official know before the mediation meeting. Your Early Intervention Official may also bring a lawyer and must tell you ahead of time that she or he plans to do so.

## Who are the mediators?

Mediators are trained, certified, and assigned by the *Community Dispute Resolution Center* in your county. They are skilled in listening to all sides of a problem and in being fair. Mediators are *not* experts



in early intervention. They *are* expert mediators who know about – and understand – the Early Intervention Program.

### What takes place at a mediation?

Your mediator meets with you and your Early Intervention Official to discuss the issues involved and help you find answers. Both of you will have the chance to share your concerns about the early intervention services that need to be settled.

The mediation process must be finished within 30 days of the Community Dispute Resolution Center receiving the request from your Early Intervention Official. Once mediation is finished, a written agreement is prepared describing what was agreed to and any outstanding issues. Your service coordinator will make sure this agreement is added to your IFSP.

### Does mediation cost anything?

There is no cost to you for mediation. All costs are paid for by the New York State Department of Health federal funds under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

### What if no agreement is reached?

If you and your Early Intervention Official cannot agree on your IFSP, you can ask for an *impartial hearing*.

### What is an impartial hearing?

An *impartial hearing* is another way for parents to settle disagreements with the Early Intervention Official about services in an IFSP. Parents can also ask for an impartial hearing if their child is found ineligible for services by an evaluator.

You have the right to ask for an impartial hearing to settle these problems, even if you take part in a mediation first. You do not have to take part in mediation before getting an impartial hearing. Both options are open to you and your family.

Impartial hearings are carried out by hearing officers who are fair and unbiased. These hearing officers are administrative law judges assigned by the Department of Health.

At a hearing, parents and early intervention officials give *testimony* and may use *witnesses* to

